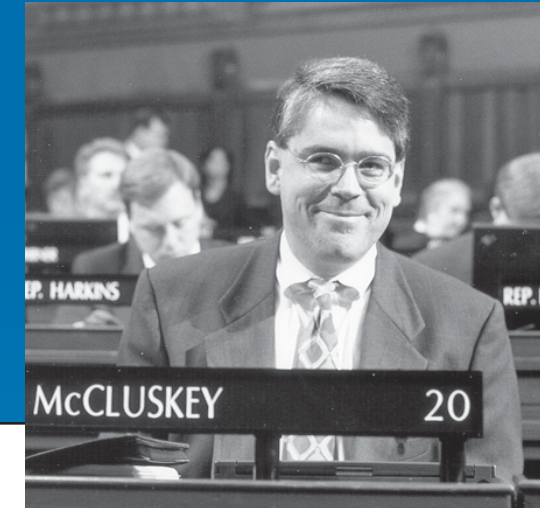


# State Representative David McCluskey

## 2005 Legislative Report



Dear Neighbors;

*The 2005 legislative session was very interesting and unusual. For the first time in Connecticut's 200 plus years as a state, we had a Lieutenant Governor succeed a Governor who resigned from office due to corruption. This changed the political landscape and reduced the political tension between the two political parties.*

*For the past several years, the battle over the state budget had swamped most other public policy debates. However, this year, we were faced with many controversial social policy decisions including the Death Penalty, Civil Unions, Stem Cell Research and the legalization of Medical Marijuana to name a few. Not surprisingly, the volume of e-mails, phone calls and letters from constituents increased dramatically. I endeavored to respond personally to as many of them as I could.*

*On some of these difficult issues there was no consensus among the West Hartford residents who contacted me. I did my best to listen to all sides and arguments and take a position. I have agonized over many of these choices. But ultimately, I have always looked to the words of that great Anglo-Irish Statesman/Philosopher Edmund Burke who said, "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion."*

*I tried to explain my positions on the issues to those who contacted me in a straightforward way without equivocation or meaningless, empty phrases. But obviously with difficult choices, I had to disappoint, anger, and/or frustrate someone. As I have gotten older, perhaps experience has reinforced the point of how fallible we all are as human beings. We don't have all the information, we don't always balance competing interests in the best fashion, and we don't always make the right choice among difficult alternatives. The voters and history will ultimately judge whether I have made more good decisions than bad.*

*I am especially proud of two accomplishments I worked on this year. First, we restored health care to low-income families. I fought hard against Governor Rowland's decision to eliminate health care because it would not save money. Instead, it simply shifted the cost to uncompensated emergency room care and undermined the health and financial security of struggling families. Second, I was one of the crafters of Governor Rell's Transportation Initiative. In particular, I worked to include \$5 million in elderly/handicapped transportation and made non-highway projects eligible for funding in our area of the state. (see inside article)*

*This newsletter details some of the legislation I have worked on as well as other items/resources which may be of interest to you and your family. As always, please call me at my legislative office: 240-8585 or at home: 521-3554 if you have any questions or concerns.*

Sincerely,

20th Assembly District ★ West Hartford

... call 240-8585



For copies of  
2005  
Laws Affecting...

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(860) 240-8585

Please Keep in Touch with Representative David McCluskey

## Veterans

We must always acknowledge and honor the sacrifices the men and women in our armed forces and their families have made for us. This year, we enacted the following initiatives:

- Mobilization Awards for Members of the Connecticut National Guard
- Tuition Breaks for Military Personnel Stationed in Connecticut
- Families of Soldiers Killed in the Line of Duty Will Now Receive \$100,000 From the State
- State Income Tax Exemption for Military Pensions
- New Military Relief Fund for Families
- Monthly National Guard Bonus for Active Duty
- New Testing Program for Depleted Uranium Exposure

Also, the Department of Veterans Affairs is setting up a toll-free number that families can call when seeking information on available services. The phone number and staff should be in place by late fall. In the meantime you can access the VA website at <http://www.ct.gov/ctva>. Individuals needing immediate help can call the National Guard Family Program at 1-860-524-4866 until that time. (PA 05-3)

## VA Announces New Survivor Benefits Web Site

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has created a new Internet Web site for the surviving spouses and dependents of military personnel who died on active duty and for the survivors and dependents of veterans who died after leaving the military.

The new website can be found at [www.vba.va.gov/survivors](http://www.vba.va.gov/survivors) or by clicking the "Survivors Benefits" button on the left panel of <http://www.vba.va.gov/>.

The Web site provides information about a wide range of benefits for the surviving spouse, dependent children, and dependent parents of deceased veterans and active-duty personnel. The site also has information from — and links to — other federal agencies and organizations that offer benefits and services to survivors and dependents.



## Information for Seniors

- ⇒ The Department on Aging will become a separate agency in 2007. (PA 05-280)
- ⇒ ConnPACE participants will be required to enroll in the federal Medicaid Part D program. (PA 05-280)
- ⇒ The Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders raised the asset limits from \$19,020 for singles to \$28,530 and from \$28,530 to \$38,040 for married couples. (PA 05-280)
- ⇒ The state's effort to increase the reach back period for transfer of assets to five-years has been repealed. It will remain at the current three-year period. (PA 05-280)



### Need Help Understanding And Enrolling In Medicare Part D?

Contact the CHOICES Program:  
800-994-9422

## The First Steps to Campaign Finance Reform

This legislative session Governor Rell, the House and Senate were unable to agree on a campaign finance reform bill. After the regular session was over, the Governor established a working group to attempt to reconcile the differences among them. House Majority Leader Chris Donovan chose me to be on the task force because of my longtime support of campaign finance reform and my service on the Government Administration and Elections Committee. As this newsletter goes to press, it is not clear whether the General Assembly will go into special session to address this important public policy concern. I am honored to have been chosen to work on a bi-partisan, bi-cameral basis to reach a fair campaign reform bill. It is vital that we reduce the influence of special interests in campaigns. This impacts what legislation we do or don't enact and undermines the public's trust in our state government. I will do my best to get a bill passed by both the House and Senate and signed into law by the Governor.

## Unused Gift Cards

Gift cards have become very popular items for consumers, especially for holiday purchases. Most consumers are probably unaware that after three years the State of Connecticut receives the value of all unclaimed gift cards and certificates. In theory, a consumer with such an unused card could make a claim with the Treasurer's Office to get the money back. In practice, it is very difficult for the consumer and state to verify a card which was often purchased by someone else as a gift. In addition, the State singled out for auditing small and middle-sized Connecticut based companies and was assessing them penalties for the value of unclaimed gift cards prior to the effective date of Connecticut's unclaimed property law for gift cards. This was fundamentally unfair.

This year, working with Representatives Chris Stone, Shawn Johnston, Sandy Nafis, Mary Ann Carson and Senators Tom Colapietro and David Cappiello, I was able to pass a Gift Card reform bill which will prevent the State from keeping the value unclaimed gift cards. This is a victory for all consumers.

This new law (1) exempts the value of gift cards from the law; (2) eliminates the current law that explicitly states that the value of an unredeemed gift card is presumed abandoned three years after the purchase date or its last use, whichever is later; and (3) eliminates the requirement that gift card sellers obtain and keep the purchaser's address. It also forgives holders of abandoned property such as Connecticut's small and mid-size companies from liability to the state for interest or penalty if they failed to report or deliver abandoned gift certificates to the state treasurer before August 16, 2003. (PA 05-189)



*Rep. McCluskey, Governor Rell and other legislators at the bill signing ceremony for the new Gift Card law.*

## A Transportation Victory

Finally this year we began to address the significant transportation problems we have throughout the state which undermine our economic competitiveness by hindering the movement of people and goods and cause serious health and environmental problems.

As the Co-Chair of the Transportation Bonding Sub-Committee, I was instrumental in working with Governor Rell on passage of her Transportation Initiative. In particular, I was successful in requiring that the \$150 million in the other than I-95 highway improvements can be used in the rest of the state for non-highway projects such as the New Haven to Springfield Commuter Rail Service and the New Britain to Hartford Busway which will go through West Hartford. In addition, working with AARP and other senior groups, Rep. Tony Guerrero, Senators Bill Ciotto, Gary LeBeau and myself were able to include \$5 million annually for elder and handicapped transportation.

Also included in this \$1.3 billion transportation initiative is the addition of 340 or more new rail cars to Metro North New Haven Line, the construction of a needed rail maintenance facility, \$187 million in I-95 highway improvements and \$150 million in improvements to other roads, as well as \$7.5 million for new buses. This initiative will be financed by special tax obligation bonds, a \$1 surcharge on the New Haven line from January 1, 2008 through June 2015 and an increased gross receipts tax on petroleum products. (PA 05-4 J.S.S)

# CAPITOL news

## A New Website Just for Kids Who Learn Differently

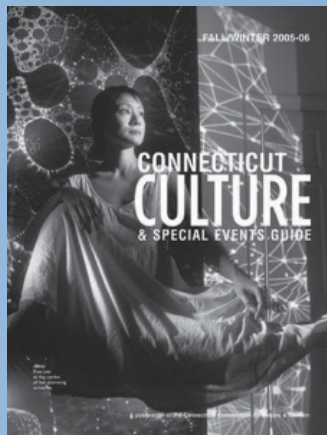
Sparktop.org is a new website designed for kids ages 10-12 with learning difficulties, including identified learning disabilities (LD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD).

Kids who struggle in school need to know that it is OK to learn differently; that everyone has their own strengths and challenges; and that they have talents which will help them achieve their dreams. This website can help kids with information about how their brain works, identify their unique strengths and showcase their creativity.

## Get Your Connecticut Culture Guide!

Residents interested in exhibitions, the performing arts, festivals, and events occurring throughout the state will find everything they need in the Fall/Winter 2005/06 Connecticut Culture Guide. This guide is devoted to promoting Connecticut's vibrant cultural assets.

The Fall/Winter edition of the *Culture Guide* is a useful and well-organized resource for those interested in exploring all that our state has to offer as the seasons shift from the adventure of outdoor pursuits to the delight of indoor entertainment. As the days shorten and families and individuals turn to indoor activities for personal enrichment, they can rely on the *Culture Guide* to provide the necessary details regarding performance and exhibit dates and the various wonders that lie behind the doors of our state's intriguing historic properties and cultural venues. You will find information on a wide range of events. From NASCAR racing, oyster and lobster festivals, open mic nights, and arts and crafts shows to garden tours and archeology digs, it's all in the Calendar of Events. In addition, readers can locate activities via the following categories: Exhibitions, Performing Arts and Historic Sites.



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